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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed 170 faculty members at a public, mid-sized eastern university, comparing men's and women's aspirations and perceived obstacles to attaining various levels of executive positions in higher education. The study used the Academic Goals and Aspirations Survey, which requested demographic information regarding rank, status, educational level, department, and years of service. It also examined aspirations, perceptions of obstacles to support, and perceptions of opportunities to achieve administrative and departmental positions. Respondents included 77 females and 93 males representing over 36 campus departments. Results indicated that more women aspired to lower-level administrative positions than men. Aspirations became nearly equal when considering the position of university vice president. Fewer women than men aimed for the office of university president. Most women wanted to serve as a director/coordinator or department chair. Females seemed to perceive the glass ceiling, sensing obstacles that did not affect men in their climb up the career ladder. Females reported homemaking and child care as the toughest social barriers to advancement. Not one male cited family responsibilities as a hindrance to career advancement. Women's perceived institutional barriers included heavy workloads, bureaucracy, higher education requirements and lack of funds to meet them, committee demands, limited tenure tracks, research/publication demands, and the "good old boys" network. Only a small minority of both sexes regarded opportunities for males and females as equal. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Running Head: A STUDY OF ASPIRATIONS AND OBSTACLES

A Study of Professional Aspirations and Perceived Obstacles: A Case for Administrative Change

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Abstract

This study surveyed faculty members of a public, mid-sized eastern university and compared women's and men's aspirations and perceived obstacles for attaining various levels of executive positions in higher education. More women aspired to lower level administrative positions than men but fewer women than men aimed for the top office, a university presidency. This study discusses the social and personal barriers perceived by women and ways to overcome them.

A Study of Professional Aspirations and Perceived Obstacles: A Case for Administrative Change

How many children dream of being a university president? Gender stereotyping may assume that men will be interested in this ivory-tower position but women will not (Robertson, Koll, Lampe, & Hegedus, 1995). Some research shows that many women enter administration in higher education at the suggestion of someone else, by accident, or by coincidence (Faulconer, 1995).

Those females who aim for this office in higher education discover that their chances have increased minimally during the last decade. In 1987 women ascended to the presidency of only three percent of the nation's state and land-grant colleges and universities (Warner & DeFleur, 1993). Warner and DeFleur cite an American Council on Education survey conducted in the late 1980's that showed women comprising a mere 11 percent of the presidents in the approximately 3,000 accredited higher education institutions, but these women gained ground mostly in community college settings rather than in large, comprehensive institutions. A 1995 research brief from the American Council on Education presents recent statistics showing that women hold approximately 16 percent of the chief executive officer positions in higher education, a small 5 percent gain over five years (as cited in "Looking for General Data," 1996).

These figures reflect the perpetuation of an historical trend. Flynn (1993) says that white males over age 50 still dominate many trustee boards. These men idealistically envision a strong charismatic male as a presidential figure. This male leads with a first lady who serves as his gracious hostess. Such a model provides little encouragement for women aspiring to the presidency.

The presidency tops a list of many senior level administrative positions in higher education that offers promising opportunities for female aspirations but delivers low probability for attainment. Warner and DeFleur (1993) studied 394 administrators at the dean's level and above in various institutions of higher learning to find that 81 percent were male. Women filled the remaining 19 percent of the administrative positions, but they were clustered at the lowest levels of administration or in female-associated areas such as dean of home economics or nursing or bookstore director (Jones, 1993).

Higher education, like the rest of the labor market, sends women mixed messages. Federal regulations have forced a change in the application environment for women. Advertisements for new administrators in colleges and universities cry out, "Women are encouraged to apply." But the sad news remains that masculine orientation maintains its domain in the campus environment (Jones, 1993). The rhetoric says that women can make it, but few actually do.

When they make it, women seem to fare better financially than their counterparts in other career fields. In the non-administrative ranks, the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that full-time female professors earn only 86.6 percent of what males earn, but that represents a higher figure than the salaries of women in general which shows full-time working women earning only 76.4 percent of men's salaries (as cited in Wilson, 1995). Nevertheless, when it comes to executive offices, "the female half of our population has often been ignored, ridiculed, thwarted, or prevented from considering leadership roles" (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 6). Although women predominate the educational field in numbers, men dominate in power (Johnson, 1995).

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Thanks to affirmative action, projected retirements in the late 1990's that will open more faculty positions, and increasing numbers of women earning doctoral degrees, universities show greater concern for the recruitment and retention of women faculty (Wunsch, 1994), but this concern has not changed women's disproportionate representation in higher education's management compared to their presence in the classroom (Faulconer, 1995). "Women typically are not encouraged to advance to administrative positions" (Robertson et al., 1995, p. 17).

However, change may loom on the horizon. Robertson et al. (1995) report a leadership paradigm shift in education. This new style of leadership emphasizes inclusionary rather than exclusionary concepts. It promotes a sense of colleagues, cooperative norms, and collectivism as opposed to leaders represented as masters with competitive norms and a focus on individualism.

Robertson et al. (1995) add that women's socialization prepares them for this transformational style of leadership. In addition, women constitute the fastest growing segment of student population in higher education (Hayes & Flannery, 1995), and more women receive training and academic degrees in administration today (Faulconer, 1995). Women's gender-role attributes and education will line up with this style of leadership, but as Johnson (1995) says, it will not include all women, nor will it exclude all men.

The future offers hope for women, but Hill & Ragland (1995) propose that past precedents can only begin to change as higher education considers what hampers women from moving forward as leaders. Armed with such information, higher education's administrators can develop successful strategies of change to tear down barriers that keep women out of administration. To gain insight into avenues for change at the local level,

researchers at a public, mid-sized, eastern university investigated faculty aspirations, perceptions of professional and personal obstacles and support, and perceptions of the effect of gender in achieving goals.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 170 faculty members, including male and female adjunct, temporary, tenure-track, and tenured members who voluntarily and anonymously completed an original survey of goals and aspirations. The university currently has a complement of 449 faculty instructing 7,916 graduate and undergraduate students. Three-hundred forty-five faculty members hold tenure track positions: 229 (94 percent) of the total complement of 274 men and 116 (66 percent) of the total complement of 175 women are in the university's tenure track. Eighty-one percent of all of the men and 76 percent of all of the women in the tenure track are already tenured.

The 1986 PEER Report Card reports that figures for faculty rank of female and male professors are directly inverse (Project on Equal Education Rights, 1986). The numbers at the university surveyed for this study continue to reflect the national figures. At the level of professor, 80 percent are male while only 20 percent are female. Seventy-three percent of the associate professors are male while 27 percent are female. Of the assistant professors, 48 percent are male and 52 percent are female. At the instructor level, 38 percent are male and 62 percent are female. Male faculty can be portrayed as a mushroom, with full professors at the top and assistants at the bottom. Conversely, female faculty may be portrayed as a pyramid with a wide base reflecting the instructor and assistant levels and full professors at the top.

Procedure

Data for the study were collected via an original survey, The Academic Goals and Aspirations Survey, distributed through campus mail to 340 faculty members. The survey stated the purpose of the study as determining faculty goals and aspirations and perceived obstacles and/or support. The survey contained demographic information regarding rank, status, educational level, department, and years of service. Questions one through eight examined aspirations using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree. Another eight questions discussed perceptions of obstacles or support as well as perceptions of opportunities to achieve administrative and departmental positions. These questions required simple yes or no answers and allowed space for specific comments to clarify each answer. A cover letter accompanied the survey instructing respondents to read, complete, and return the survey to participate in the study. The response level was 50 percent with 170 participants returning the surveys. Results were calculated by straight percentages.

Results

Of the respondents, 77 (45 percent) were female and 93 (55 percent) were male, representing more than 36 departments on campus. A larger percentage of females (87 percent) than males (71 percent) indicated a desire to advance in rank, tenure, or position in their field. For the intermediate administrative positions of director/coordinator, department chair, and academic dean, more women (50 percent, 45 percent, 25 percent) said they aspired to these positions than men (32 percent, 36 percent, 18 percent). Aspirations leveled off to nearly equal when females (15 percent) and males (16 percent) considered the position of vice president. The ratios reversed for the presidency with only

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seven percent of the females aspiring to the top administrative position although not many more men (10 percent) listed this position as a goal.

More women perceived institutional obstacles (56 percent) and personal obstacles (44 percent) than men (47 percent and 28 percent). Men perceived more institutional (51 percent) and personal (67 percent) support than women (40 percent and 60 percent).

Although the differences do not represent wide margins, greater gaps became evident as women expressed their perception of opportunities to reach higher levels in their careers. Regarding the ability to achieve departmental positions, 10 percent of the women perceived better opportunities for women than men, but 53 percent of the women believed that men still had the edge. Men were more equally split on gender. Twenty-eight percent perceived that women had better opportunities in their departments but 30 percent maintained that these opportunities went to men. Twenty-six percent of the men chose not to answer or stated that they didn't like the question, found it leading, or not applicable.

The gap widened as women indicated perceptions of attaining administrative opportunities. Eighty percent of the women perceived that men achieved these opportunities more easily while only three percent viewed these as easily attained opportunities for women. Men took a different view. Thirty-one percent of the men thought women achieved administrative positions more easily but 39 percent perceived the opportunities as greater for men. Fifteen percent of the men chose not to respond.

Only a small minority of both men and women, between five and eight percent, regarded opportunities for males and females as equal. Some men believed that their historical edge on opportunities had been "changed" or "neutralized." However, other men made comments such as women "are in service areas while men are in leadership

positions," "are resisted in high pay, high risk careers," "more often sit on committees," and have a harder time becoming tenured, while men receive more opportunities for power positions and administrative and upper management positions. As one man stated, "Because men dominate certain fields already, it requires a special effort for women to advance that men are not prepared to make."

Women perceived institutional obstacles that stand in the way of advancement as: heavy work/teaching loads, bureaucracy, higher education requirements and lack of funds and time to meet these requirements, committee demands, a limited number of tenure tracks, narrow definitions of scholarship and experience, demands for research and publication, departmental politics, and "white, male-dominated union promotion committees" or the good old boys network. The women found support in a functioning Professional Development Committee, helpful fellow faculty members, and flexible hours that enable graduate studies. However, one woman commented that the support at the highest levels did not always translate into opportunity in the middle levels such as the department. Other women perceived their departments as supportive. Apparently women did not evaluate all departments as providing equal opportunities, and, as a few male respondents pointed out, some departments still employ no female members.

Women most often cited family responsibilities as a personal obstacle in achieving career advancement. Other obstacles included finances, lack of freedom, time management, physical stamina, and job security or unwillingness to take a risk. When considering personal support, most women found spouse, family, friends, and colleagues their greatest assets.

A large body of literature has already discussed most of the above issues. However, the fact that these responses have not changed in spite of the many years invested in improving administrative opportunities for women reveals a disturbing lack of progress.

Discussion

The aspirations of women responding to the survey reflect the campus climate of achievability. The majority of women in this study want to serve as a director/coordinator or department chair. Men now hold 52 percent and women hold 48 percent of such positions. The department chair position reflects the same male-female split found in total faculty. Females hold 39 percent of the faculty positions and 40 percent of the department chairs.

Female respondents seemed to perceive the glass ceiling, the subtle barrier women face as they climb the corporate ladder (Prochaska & Norcross, 1994), at the level of vice president, carrying through to the presidency. Historically in the institution sampled, only one woman held either of these executive positions. In the other top administrative posts on campus--five academic deans, four vice presidents, and associate provost--only three have ever been held by a female. Although 87 percent of the survey's female participants desire to advance, only 25 percent set their sights on a deanship. Even fewer (7 percent) aspire to a university presidency.

The numbers reflect several imbalances regarding gender. In the job group analysis of the university's 1994 Affirmative Action Plan, women held only 37 percent of the positions in the executive, administrative, and management category; 34 percent of the tenure-track faculty positions; and 43 percent of the service maintenance positions.

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However, the scales tip disproportionately for other job classifications. Women hold 57 percent of the non-tenure track faculty positions, 63 percent of the technical/ paraprofessional positions, and 90 percent of the secretarial/clerical jobs on campus.

In addition, the balance does not reflect the gender makeup of the student body. Women comprise 60 percent of the student enrollment, and the university awarded 61 percent of its undergraduate degrees and 74 percent of its graduate degrees to women in the 1993-94 academic year (Kutztown University, 1994).

These data could help explain why female respondents indicate they want to advance yet perceive limited opportunities. Add institutional and personal obstacles to perceived opportunities and the probability of advancement shrinks further. But what can help women change these prospects? The obstacles fall into two categories important to the future of women: social barriers and personal barriers. Women must recognize the difference between the two. Breaking social barriers will require new attitudes and policies on the part of current educational administration. However, women must overcome personal barriers by making tough choices and sacrifices.

Women in this survey reported homemaking and child-care responsibilities as the toughest social barrier. This may seem like a personal barrier, but a comparison with men's responses reveals broad social implications. Many women listed these areas as a primary obstacle, but not one male cited family responsibilities as a hindrance to his career advancement.

Married women have dramatically changed the face of the labor force over the past 25 years. However, McHale & Crouter (1992) report that even with full-time employment, housekeeping and child care continue to be women's responsibilities. No

evidence demonstrates that men have increased their time investment in domestic chores to balance the time women spend at a job.

Mannheim and Schiffrin reported a poll in which 50 percent of the men agreed they should share domestic work when their wives were employed, but few of these men translated their thoughts into practice by sharing 50-50 in the housework and child-care duties (as cited in Jones, 1993). It thus appears that men conceive of equality as wives sharing in the responsibility of earning money but husbands not necessarily sharing in child-care responsibilities (Jones, 1993). If attitudes have changed, behavior on a large scale has not.

While administrative policy can't tackle all of the primary problem, it can change aspects of it. For example, the automatic and unjustifiable assumption that children will interfere with work penalizes women climbing career ladders (Jones, 1993; Hill & Ragland, 1995). Few interviewers ask men how they will handle administration and child-rearing. Therefore, an equitable policy would exempt women from similar questioning.

Policy can also assist women in breaking through the traditional network that attends to a protégé by senior management level involvement and mentoring. These informal networks often exclude women (Flynn, 1993). Including women in administration and supervision must be a deliberate and planned action (Robertson et al., 1995).

The informal mentoring process has boosted many men to top executive positions, and today a formal mentorship (Wunsch, 1994) can open new doors of opportunity for women. In a study of women in top-level positions in California's 107 community colleges, respondents cited mentoring as the number one technique for increasing the number of women in administration in higher education (Faulconer, 1995). The mentoring

process could resolve problems by revealing rather than hiding glass-ceiling barriers (Johnson, 1995), by confronting past overt barriers to ivory tower administrative traditions now packaged in more subtle guises (Hill & Ragland, 1995), and by handing down standards of professional behavior and socialization that scholars still largely determine by unwritten rules passed from one generation to the next (Wunsch, 1994).

Policy can address social barriers, but what about personal barriers? Many of the cited obstacles of female respondents--teaching loads, a required doctorate, lack of funding, lack of understanding relating to higher education and administration, time management, and unwillingness to take a risk--serve as areas of personal sacrifice and paying one's dues.

Men are socialized to believe they can come up through the ranks to full professor and, if lucky, can progress on, possibly to president. They pay their dues and get ahead. Women lack that same awareness. They are not taught to think that way. Although some women aspire to high offices, they show little awareness of the need to pay one's dues. Working the extra hours, aggressively seeking grant moneys for further education, obtaining the doctorate, and learning the rules of higher education's administration can all be viewed as paying one's dues. But women rarely recognize the rigorous path they must follow (Flynn, 1993).

Therefore, women are often poorly prepared to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves. As Flynn (1993) points out, "Acceptable roles for women don't address leadership possibilities, and females often aren't aware that they need to choose a different path if they expect some day to aspire to leadership" (p. 121).

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In addition, many women have difficulty imagining themselves in leadership due to gender stereotypes. American society socializes females to compete against other females for men, not men's positions (Flynn, 1993). This leads to women not trusting other women in leadership and also the perception that women must be masculine to succeed in a man's world.

But women who have succeeded bring good news for others aspiring to leadership positions. As Harter (1993) says, "If women can learn more about the dynamics of organizational culture--a culture which, after all, was created, nourished, defined and sustained by men--at the same time they retain the nurturing values of traditional femininity, they will inevitably move into the most influential roles" (p. 27).

Women are forming an impressive track record as they are hired in dismal situations as scapegoats and sacrificial lambs and turn out to be messiahs. Many exemplary women leaders report their first shot at an administrative position had a caveat attached (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

In today's social climate, women with higher aspirations must prepare themselves to perform better on the job than men if they want to be considered ready for the next highest position. They must prioritize educating themselves on the demands of eligibility for top leadership offices and be willing to learn from other women about the necessary sacrifices for success.

Conclusion

Results of this survey reinforce the findings of a large body of gender equity literature. Female respondents indicate ambitions and aspirations for career advancement. They also perceive obstacles that do not affect men in their climb up the career ladder.

Such results continue to reveal gender equity problems in the administration of higher education.

But administrators hold the key to unlocking these problems so that women can contribute their talents in the future. Current administrators can begin solving the problem by setting ground-breaking policy that promotes equity in the ivory tower and by mentoring women as well as men. They can also exhibit attitudes that promote equality and encourage women with strong leadership potential in teacher education programs to consider administrative positions (Robertson et al., 1995).

These new policies and attitudes need not threaten males. Helgesen suggests that women will impact shifting leadership paradigms because of their ability to balance masculine styles of leadership rather than replace them (as cited in Robertson et al., 1995).

If today's administrators invest their efforts in gender equity for higher education's administration, more women will set their sights on top executive positions. Little girls as well as boys can make the dream of growing up to be a university president less rhetoric and more reality as they work towards a world in which career advancement is truly based on a person's qualifications rather than gender.

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